

# Immunohistochemical Localization of Basement Membrane Components During Hair Follicle Morphogenesis

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Specific antisera were used to investigate the distributions of several basement membrane zone (BMZ) components, namely, bullous pemphigoid antigen (BPA), heparan sulfate proteoglycan (HSPG), laminin, and type IV collagen, during the development of hair follicles in late embryo rats. BPA was not visible by indirect immunofluorescence in the BMZ before epidermal involution but appeared in all regions of BMZ after this had occurred. As follicular length increased during maturation, the distribution of BPA was no longer uniform, being reduced or absent from the BMZ around the lower part of the elongating follicle. HSPG was associated with the basal cell layer prior to the appearance of hair follicle primordia and became BMZ-associated before birth but after follicle buds were first observed. HSPG was also found to be associated with the basal cell surfaces in the epidermis, but not in the hair follicle. Laminin and type IV collagen were continually present in epidermal and follicular BMZ both before and during development of hair follicles and were later present in the dermal papilla matrix. From these observations we conclude that (1) laminin and type IV collagen are functionally important for BMZ integrity before and during epidermal and follicular maturation, (2) HSPG may have a cell surface function in epidermis as well as roles in BMZ organization and properties, and (3) the distribution of BPA is indicative of its association only with regions of tissue not involved in morphogenetic change. We also suggest that the cell-matrix interactions documented for BPA, HSPG, laminin, and fibronectin may depend on the type of tissue involved and its state of development, differentiation, or repair.

During skin development, inductive messages are transmitted from the dermis to the epidermis that lead to the ordered histogenesis of epidermis and determine the nature of the cutaneous appendages [1,2]. The mechanism of action of such molecular signals is poorly understood, but it has been proposed that the extracellular matrix at the dermal-epidermal junction plays an important role [3-5]. Components of this basement membrane zone (BMZ) in skin include the high-molecular-

weight glycoproteins fibronectin [6,7] and laminin [8,9], type IV collagen [10,11], heparan sulfate proteoglycan (HSPG) [12,13], and the bullous pemphigoid antigen (BPA) [14,15] (and see also review in [16]). The distribution of these components within the BMZ may vary from site to site [16,17] and although many interactions among them have been elucidated by *in vitro* analysis [18-20], the assembly and functional attributes of each component are far from understood. Whatever the organization of the BMZ, it must, however, provide a structural and functional base on which epithelia can function. Experiments have shown, for example, that BMZ components can influence the internal organization and behavior of epithelial cells as well as their proliferation [21].

The morphogenesis of hair in the rat is a rapid process occurring during the last few days of gestation. A fully stratified epidermis and functional hair follicles arise from 3 or 4 cell layers of undifferentiated epithelium, concomitant with dermal fibroblast specialization leading to dermal papilla formation. The later stages of skin embryogenesis therefore represent a dynamic system in which complex morphogenetic changes occur. In addition, a preformed BMZ has also been shown to be important for hair growth and development [22-24], and we have investigated the relative distributions of several BMZ components over this period.

We have previously studied the distribution of fibronectin in late embryo rat skin and have suggested possible roles for this matrix component during late embryogenesis and hair follicle development [7,25]. BPA has already been shown to be heterogeneously distributed in late embryonic and neonatal mouse skin [26], and we report here that BPA is absent from the lower follicular BMZ during the development of hair follicles in late embryo rat skin, but is present in the lower follicular BMZ during regressive and resting periods at the end of this and subsequent growth cycles. We show that laminin and type IV collagen are continually present in the BMZ during follicular development and appear in the dermal papilla matrix of more mature follicles. In addition, we have found that HSPG is present in the BMZ only after the first follicles begin to develop and we have observed a basal cell surface distribution of this proteoglycan in epidermis, hitherto not demonstrated.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### *Preparation of IgG Fractions from Bullous Pemphigoid (BP) and Normal Human Sera*

High-titer BP antiserum (kindly supplied by Dr. R. StC. Barnetson) or normal human serum from healthy adults was adsorbed, using 3-ml aliquots, onto a column of protein A-Sepharose CL4B, (0.7 g, final bed volume 2 ml, Pharmacia [Great Britain] Ltd., Hounslow, Middlesex). The column was washed with phosphate-buffered saline (PBS), pH 7.4, until no more unbound protein was eluted. The bound IgG fraction was then eluted with 0.58% acetic acid in 0.15 M NaCl and the eluate neutralized with solid Tris (2-amino-2-hydroxymethyl-propane-1,3 diol). This eluate (6 ml) was desalted and concentrated by ultrafiltration. The protein content of the final solution was 7 mg/ml and samples were freeze-dried and stored at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

### *HSPG Antiserum*

Antiserum to Engelbreth-Holm-Swarm (EHS) tumor HSPG used in this study was kindly provided by Dr. J. R. Hassell and Dr. G. R.

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#### Abbreviations:

- BP: bullous pemphigoid
- BPA: bullous pemphigoid antigen
- BSA: bovine serum albumin
- BMZ: basement membrane zone
- EHS: Engelbreth-Holm-Swarm
- FITC: fluorescein isothiocyanate
- HSPG: heparan sulfate proteoglycan
- IIF: indirect immunofluorescence
- PBS: phosphate-buffered saline
- Tris: 2-amino-2-hydroxymethyl-propane-1,3 diol

Martin [12]. The antiserum was adsorbed with laminin coupled to Sepharose CL4B (Pharmacia [Great Britain] Ltd.) before use. We have also used HSPG from liver cell surfaces and an antiserum raised against it, both of which were kindly provided by Dr. M. Höök [13,\*].

#### Type IV Collagen Antiserum

Type IV collagen was extracted from human placenta by pepsin digestion [27] and precipitated from 0.5 M acetic acid with 1 M NaCl. Further purification was effected by repeated salt precipitation and ion-exchange chromatography [28]. Antibodies were raised in a New Zealand rabbit by subcutaneous injection of 1.2 mg of type IV collagen in complete Freund's adjuvant, followed by an identical injection 31 days later. The sera used were obtained from bleeds taken 43–108 days after the first injection. The specificity of the antiserum was demonstrated by inhibition of enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay [29]. The reaction was not inhibited by human placental type III collagen, type V collagen from human fetal membrane, or laminin from EHS tumor [8]. An immunoblotting technique [30] showed that the antiserum recognized all the major denatured fragments of prepared type IV collagen chains. Human, bovine, and rat collagen chains  $\alpha_1$ (I) and  $\alpha_2$ (I), human collagen chains  $\alpha_1$ (III),  $\alpha_1$ (V), and  $\alpha_2$ (V) did not bind the antiserum.

#### Laminin Antiserum

Rabbit antiserum to laminin derived from murine Reichert's membrane was kindly supplied by Dr. B. L. M. Hogan [31].

#### Tissue Preparation

Embryonic skin from 16- to 20-day-old house-bred albino Wistar CFHB rat fetuses was used, with the day of vaginal plug formation taken as day zero of embryonic growth. Skin from 16- to 18-day-old fetuses was carefully dissected and pieces stretched over segments of maternal liver before being snap-frozen for cryostat sectioning. Skin from 19- and 20-day-old fetuses was frozen flat in a double layer. Guinea pig esophagus or tongue (albino Duncan Hartley guinea pigs) was used for BP antibody titer measurements. Cryostat sections of 5–7  $\mu$ m were made at  $-20^\circ\text{C}$  and the frozen tissue sections either air-dried or fixed, according to the antibody used.

#### Indirect Immunofluorescent Staining (IIF)

Sections to be stained for BPA were air-dried and pretreated with 1% bovine serum albumin (BSA) for 15 min, followed by a 1:20 dilution of the reconstituted BP IgG fraction in PBS, and incubated for 30 min at room temperature in a wet-box. Following 3 washes with PBS, the sections were incubated for 30 min with a 1:32 dilution of sheep antihuman IgG conjugated with fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC; F/P molar ratio 3.2, protein concentration 8 mg/ml, Seward Laboratory, London, England). The sections were rinsed thoroughly and then mounted in glycerol/PBS (9:1, v/v) containing *p*-phenylene diamine (0.1%), pH 8 [32]. Control sections were treated with normal human IgG fraction or PBS, followed by the FITC conjugate.

IIF for HSPG, laminin, and type IV collagen was carried out in a similar fashion. Sections were air-dried (HSPG only) or fixed for 10 min at room temperature with 3.5% freshly hydrolyzed paraformaldehyde in PBS, followed by washing in 0.1 M ammonium chloride in PBS. The anti-HSPG serum was used at a dilution of 1:5 in a 5% solution of BSA in PBS, antilaminin serum at a dilution of 1:50 in PBS, and the anti-type IV collagen serum at a dilution of 1:20 in PBS. FITC-conjugated goat antirabbit IgG (F/P molar ratio 3.5, protein concentration 10 mg/ml, Miles Laboratories, Slough, England) was used at a dilution of 1:40 in PBS. Sections were mounted in aqueous polyvinyl alcohol medium. Controls comprised: nonimmune serum, PBS (and others [31]), or 5% BSA in PBS, followed by FITC conjugate, for type IV collagen, laminin, and HSPG respectively. In the absence of a preimmune serum for HSPG, an antigen adsorption experiment was carried out using HSPG from liver cell plasma membranes [13,\*] with the antiserum from the EHS tumor [12]. Sections of 20-day-old embryonic rat skin were used for IIF in this control.

All sections were examined on a Leitz Ortholux II microscope fitted with a Ploem vertical illuminator and fluorescence optics, and photographs taken on Ilford HP5, XP1, or FP4 films.

## RESULTS

Hair follicle primordia develop from the 16th day of gestation in fetal rat skin, the first indication being a subepidermal cluster of fibroblasts, which are cells of the presumptive dermal papilla (Fig 1a). From the 17th to the 20th day of gestation the follicular buds undergo rapid morphogenesis to produce an elongated follicle with a short hair cone and a fully developed dermal papilla (Fig 1b).

#### Bullous Pemphigoid Antigen

We found that BPA could not be detected by IIF in the BMZ at day 16 of gestation when hair follicle primordia were already present. It first appeared between days 17–18 as a faint discontinuous staining (Fig 2a), which became continuous between days 19–20 (Fig 2b). IIF staining for BPA remained continuous in the interfollicular BMZ during subsequent postnatal hair growth cycles. As the hair follicles enlarged in diameter and penetrated further into the dermis, the IIF staining for BPA in the follicular BMZ was diminished toward the lower end of the follicle (Fig 2b). This state persisted throughout the neonatal growing phase of the follicle when IIF staining for BPA was present only in the BMZ above the level of the sebaceous gland. However, IIF staining for BPA was observed in the lower follicular BMZ during follicle regression at the end of the first growth period (Fig 2c) and during the resting phase of the follicular growth cycle (Fig 2d). There was no IIF staining for BPA in the BMZ around the lower follicle during the growing phase of weanling and subsequent hair growth cycles; however, staining for BPA was observed in this region during the regressive and resting phases of these cycles. At no time during the development or growth of hair follicles was IIF staining for BPA observed in the dermal papilla matrix. Control sections at no time showed BMZ staining (not shown).

#### Heparan Sulfate Proteoglycan

At 16 days gestation HSPG was predominantly associated with the basal cell layer of the epidermis (Fig 3a), but whether it was localized to the BMZ at this time could not be discriminated. By 19 or 20 days, however, HSPG was apparently localized in the BMZ of both epidermis and hair follicles (Fig 3b) and basal epidermal cell surfaces were also stained (Fig 3b).

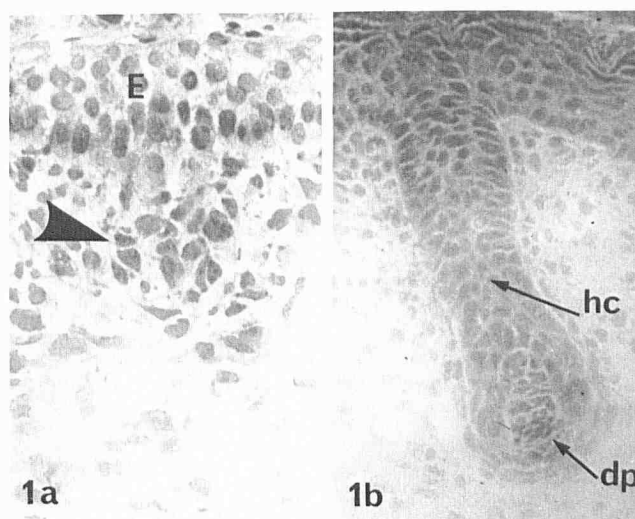


FIG 1. Rat skin from 16-day-old (a) and 20-day-old (b) embryos. The dermal fibroblast cluster shown in a (arrowhead) forms the dermal papilla of more mature follicles as shown in b. Hair formation originates with cells in the hair cone which is just discernable in 20-day-old embryonic skin shown in b. E = epidermis, dp = dermal papilla, hc = hair cone. Hematoxylin and eosin;  $\times 500$ ,  $\times 200$ .

\* Woods A, Höök M, Kjellén L, Rees DA, Smith CG: Relationship of heparan sulphate proteoglycans to the cytoskeleton and extracellular matrix of cultured fibroblasts. Manuscript in preparation.

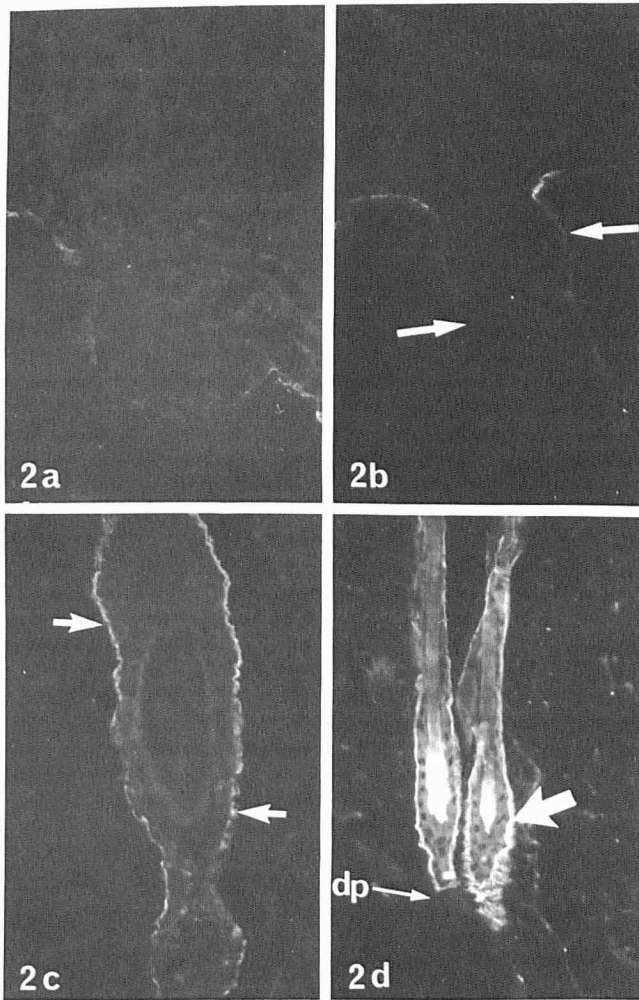


FIG 2. Indirect immunofluorescent staining of embryonic and post-natal rat skin using BP IgG. *a*, Sixteen-day-old embryonic skin where BMZ staining is faint and patchy. *b*, Twenty-day-old embryonic skin. Here staining is more intense and is continuous in the BMZ around the upper follicle and between follicles. However, there is no staining in the lower follicular BMZ. *c*, A follicle in 7-week-old rat skin which is in the regressive phase and demonstrates staining for BPA in the lower follicular BMZ. *d*, Two follicles in 3-week-old rat skin which are in the resting phase. From the follicle on the left of the figure it can be seen that there is no BPA associated with the dermal papilla. The staining in this region in the follicle on the right is due to the plane of section. Arrows indicate the follicular BMZ. *dp* = Dermal papilla. *a*,  $\times 330$ , *b*,  $\times 500$ , *c*,  $\times 200$ , and *d*,  $\times 270$ .

*c*). This cell-surface distribution of HSPG has not previously been demonstrated *in vivo* and did not extend to the follicular basal cells (Fig 3*c*). Controls using antiserum to EHS tumor HSPG that had been preadsorbed with HSPG from liver cell plasma membranes did not show this epidermal basal cell surface distribution of HSPG (Fig 3*d*). However, BMZ staining was sometimes observed, although it was faint and patchy (Fig 3*d*). This possibly indicates that the liver cell-derived HSPG did not bind all antibodies to HSPG, only those against cell-surface HSPG. Antiserum to liver cell-derived HSPG produces a staining pattern similar to that raised against EHS tumor HSPG, although BMZ staining is generally weaker (not shown). We consider therefore that this previously unobserved cell-surface distribution of HSPG *in vivo* is demonstrated by specific immunohistochemical staining. HSPG has been shown previously to be associated with cell surfaces in cell and organ culture studies (see discussion) and this is compatible with the results shown here.

#### Laminin and Type IV Collagen

Laminin and type IV collagen were present in the cutaneous BMZ at day 16 of gestation, both around involuting follicles (Fig 4*a,b*) and above areas of presumptive dermal papillae (not shown). These antigens were consistently present as BMZ components throughout the developmental period described here.

Staining was at all times continuous, no discontinuities being detected before or during the process of hair follicle formation (other than those attributable to sectioning artifact). However, the intensity of IIF staining was observed to increase toward birth. Follicles at day 19 or 20 of gestation showed the hair bulb enclosing the dermal papilla, and IIF staining for laminin and type IV collagen was observed in the BMZ around the dermal papilla and within the papilla matrix (Fig 4*c,d*). This "matrix" staining could have arisen partly from the basement membranes of capillaries that supply the dermal papilla. Stain-

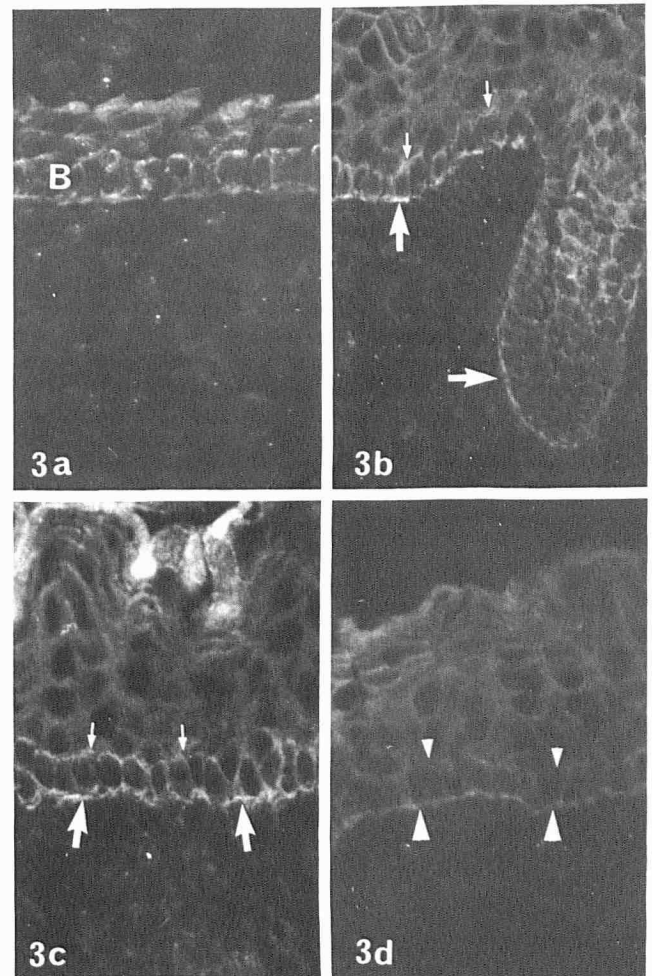


FIG 3. Indirect immunofluorescent staining of embryonic rat skin using antiserum to EHS tumor HSPG. *a*, Sixteen-day-old skin where staining is associated with the basal cell layer of the epidermis but does not appear to be in the BMZ. *b* and *c*, Twenty-day-old skin where staining for HSPG is associated both with the BMZ (large arrows) and with the basal cell surface (small arrows). *d*, "Control" shows 20-day-old embryonic skin stained with antiserum to EHS tumor HSPG that had been preadsorbed with HSPG from liver cell plasma membranes. There is noticeably less staining of the basal cell surfaces (small arrowheads) but some faint BMZ staining remained (large arrowheads). This demonstrates the specificity of the basal cell surface staining observed (*b* and *c*). *B* = basal cell layer. *a*, *b* and *d*,  $\times 330$ , *c*,  $\times 500$ .



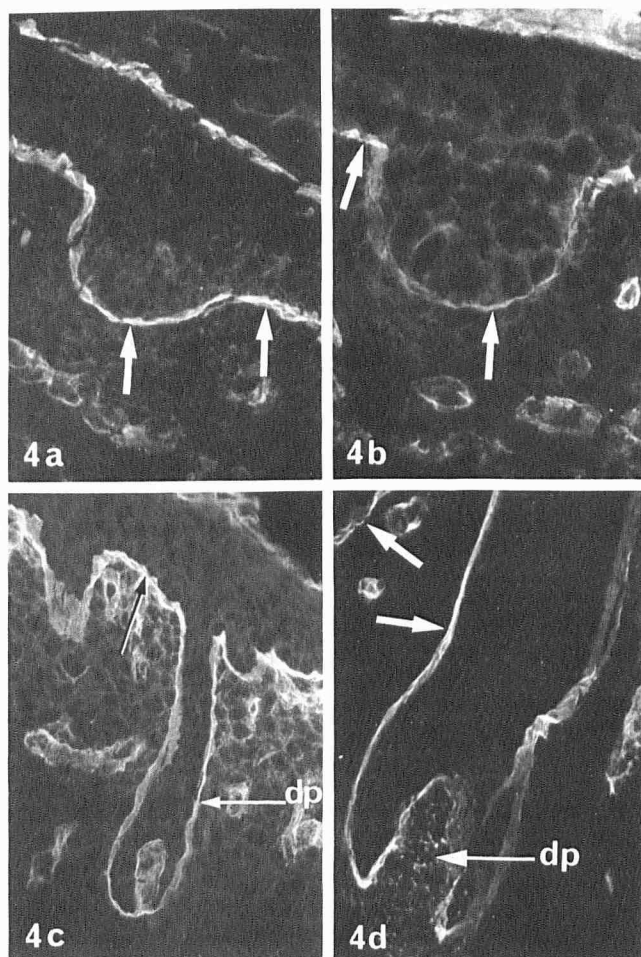


FIG 4. Indirect immunofluorescent staining of embryonic rat skin with antiserum to laminin (a and c) and type IV collagen (b and d). a and b, Sixteen-day-old skin where staining for laminin and type IV collagen is both intense and continuous in all regions of BMZ (arrows). c and d, Twenty-day-old skin where staining for these components is again intense and continuous both in follicular and interfollicular regions of BMZ (arrows). c and d also show staining for laminin (c) and type IV collagen (d) associated with the dermal papilla. dp = Dermal papilla. a, b and d  $\times 500$ , c  $\times 330$ .

ing of controls for laminin and type IV collagen was negative for all the basement membranes in skin.

### DISCUSSION

This work was initiated to further the study of the relative distributions of known BMZ components in the later stages of embryonic skin development. The rapid maturation of the epidermis and development of hair follicles at this time are processes dependent on dermal-epidermal interaction [2,33], and our observations over this period have provided fresh evidence as to the possible roles of these BMZ components and the significance of their relative distributions in this dynamic system.

#### Bullous Pemphigoid Antigen

BPA distribution is known to be nonuniform in the BMZ of embryonic and neonatal mouse skin [22,26] and our results using rat skin support these findings. Such a heterogeneous distribution of a BMZ component highlights the possibility that basal cell-matrix interactions may be different for the epidermis and the lower hair follicle. Since BPA was observed at the dermal-epidermal junction (by IIF) and around follicle buds after their initial involution, it is likely that most basal epidermal cells are capable of synthesizing the antigen and

depositing it into the cutaneous basement membrane. Indeed, in vitro studies have shown that basal epidermal cells synthesize BPA in culture [34,35]. Subsequent to epithelial specialization in areas of follicle bud formation, the newly forming basal cells in the growing follicle presumably either do not synthesize or do not deposit the antigen in the lower follicular BMZ, or its expression is prevented due to degradation or possibly antigenic masking. The appearance of the antigen during follicular regression could, by these same arguments, be due to either de novo synthesis by the basal cells abutting the follicular BMZ or an unmasking of the antigen in this region. Although masking and unmasking of antigenic determinants cannot be discounted as a possible cause of this phenomenon, it is perhaps likely that the presence or absence of BPA influences a particular type of cell-matrix interaction during the different phases of the follicular growth cycle.

It is possible, therefore, that in vivo BPA is involved with cell-matrix adhesion and evidence from cell culture studies supports this [34,35]. Such evidence, in conjunction with results from experiments using suction blisters [36] and pathologic bullae [15,37], is indicative of a role for BPA intimately involving the basal cell plasma membrane and its interaction with the underlying matrix. Recently it has been suggested that BPA may be necessary for cellular differentiation in the epidermis [38], and its close proximity to the basal cells may well reflect such a role for this BMZ component.

#### Heparan Sulfate Proteoglycan

Our results clearly demonstrate that HSPG distribution in skin is not restricted to the BMZ as was previously reported [12,39], but is specifically associated with the basal cell layer of the epidermis. The distribution seen here is consistent with other reports demonstrating a cell-surface distribution of this proteoglycan [40,\*]. Cell surface-associated HSPG was not observed in the basal layer of the hair follicle where the stain was restricted to the region of the BMZ. Whether this was partly due to the plane of section could not be determined, but our results for BPA (above) have already indicated one difference between epidermal and follicular regions of BMZ. A heterogeneous distribution of basal cell-associated HSPG would also indicate that these two cell populations differ in functionality even though they are of common origin and are juxtaposed to a basement membrane. We have also observed that the antiserum to EHS tumor HSPG will stain both basement membranes and liver cell surfaces in the rat, which indicates that similar antigenic determinants are shared by HSPG from both locations (unpublished observations).

The role of HSPG in basement membranes is not known but it may function as a regulator of molecular traffic across the BMZ [41,42]. In this context it is significant that we could not detect HSPG in the region of the BMZ of 16-day-old embryonic rat skin, i.e., at a time when molecular traffic across the dermal-epidermal junction may include signals for epidermal differentiation and follicular morphogenesis. It is not yet known how, or to what, HSPG is bound in basement membranes, although in vitro it is assembled into the extracellular matrix by both mesenchymal and epithelial cells [43,44] and may therefore mediate cell adhesion to collagenous matrices and their associated glycoproteins [45].

#### Laminin and Type IV Collagen

Laminin and type IV collagen are BMZ-associated in rat skin from day 16 of gestation and possibly earlier, and may be primary structural constituents of the BMZ. Their continued presence during follicle morphogenesis suggests that although there are extensive morphologic changes occurring that affect the relationship between the BMZ and basal cells of the elongating follicle, laminin and type IV collagen probably do not contribute directly to these changes but maintain BMZ integrity around the enlarging follicle. Some of the laminin and type

IV collagen observed in the matrix of the dermal papillae could originate from papillary blood vessels, but it is possible that these specialized fibroblastic cells synthesize a matrix for their own support which contains these matrix constituents. Fibronectin has been shown previously to be present in the dermal papilla matrices in embryonic and adult rat skin [7,25].

Although each of the BMZ components studied here has been implicated with roles in cell adhesion *in vitro* [46,18,45,34], it may be that their precise functions *in vivo* are dependent on the state of development, growth, differentiation, repair, etc. of the tissues concerned. For example, BPA is associated with particular epithelial types [14], laminin synthesis coincides with BMZ formation and associated cell aggregation events [5,46], HSPG is thought to be important in tissue morphogenesis [47], and fibronectin may be important in the processes of cell migration and wound repair [48].

In conclusion, our studies have demonstrated that whereas some BMZ components are continually present in the BMZ both before and during late embryonic skin development and hair follicle morphogenesis (laminin and type IV collagen), others appear later and are subsequently heterogeneously distributed as the epithelium gains new functionality (HSPG and BPA). In addition, we have highlighted that the embryogenesis of skin and hair is a suitable system for investigating the possible roles of basement membrane constituents *in vivo* at a time when morphogenetic activity in the skin is at a peak.

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